LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 15
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

The Atheist's Mass
and
An Accursed House

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HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY
GIRARD, KANSAS

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Doctor Bianchon, a physician to whom science is indebted for a grand physiological theory, and who, though still a young man, is considered one of the celebrities of the School of Paris (itself a center of light to which all the physicians of Europe pay homage), had practiced surgery for a long time before he devoted himself to medicine. His early studies were directed by one of the greatest of French surgeons, a man who passed through the scientific world like a meteor—the celebrated Despleins. As his enemies themselves acknowledge, an intransmittable method was buried in his tomb. Like all men of genius he had no heirs; he carried—and he carried away everything with him. The fame of a surgeon is like the fame of an actor; it exists only as long as they live, and their talent is no longer appreciable after they have disappeared. Actors and surgeons, like great singers also, and those masters who increase the power of music tenfold by their execution, are all heroes of the moment. Despleins himself is a proof of this similarity between the destinies of these transitory geniuses; his name, yesterday so celebrated, is today almost forgotten; it will last only in his special sphere, and will not pass beyond it. But are not unheard-of circumstances required for the name of a *savant* to

pass beyond the domain of his science into the general history of humanity? Had Despleins that universality of knowledge which makes a man the *Word*, the *Expression* of an age? Despleins possessed a divine glance; he penetrated into the patient and his disease by natural or acquired intuition which enabled him to seize the diagnostics peculiar to the individual, and taking into consideration the atmospheric conditions and the peculiarities of the temperament, to determine the precise time, the hour, the minute for an operation to take place. In order thus to proceed in concert with nature, had he studied the incessant juncture between beings and elementary substances contained in the atmosphere or furnished by the earth for their absorption and preparation by man, in order that he may draw from them a peculiar expression? Did he proceed by that deductive and analogical power to which the genius of Cuvier is due?—However that may be, he made himself the confidant of the flesh; by relying on the present he comprehended it in the past and the future. But did he sum up all science in his own person as Hippocrates, Galen, and Aristotle did? Had he led a whole school to new worlds? No. If it is impossible to deny that this perpetual observer of human chemistry possessed the ancient science of magism —that is to say, the knowledge of the elements in fusion, of the causes of life, of life before life, of what from its preparations it will be before it is, still it is but just to admit that everything in him was personal; he was iso-

lated in his life by egoism, and today his egoism is the suicide of his fame. Upon his tomb rises no sonorous statue proclaiming to the future the mysteries which genius seeks at its expense. But perhaps the talent of Despleins was part and parcel of his belief, and consequently mortal. To him the terrestrial atmosphere was a generative bag; he could see the earth like an egg in its shell, and not being able to decide whether the egg or the fowl came first, he admitted neither the shell nor the egg. He believed neither in the animal anterior nor the spirit posterior to man. Despleins was not in doubt, he affirmed. In his frank, unmixed atheism he was like so many *savants*, the best men in the world, but invincible atheists, such atheists as religious men will not acknowledge can exist. This opinion could not be otherwise in a man accustomed from early youth to dissect the being *par excellence* before, during, and after his life, to search him through all his organization, without finding that single soul which is so necessary to religious theories. Recognizing in man a cerebral center, a nervous center and an aerosanguineous center the two former supplying each other's places so well that he was convinced during the last two or three days of his life that the sense of hearing was not absolutely necessary for hearing, nor the sense of sight absolutely necessary for seeing, and that the solar plexus could replace them beyond suspicion of any change; Despleins, I say, finding two souls in man,

confirmed his atheism by this fact, although it still proves nothing on the subject of God. This man, it is said, died in the final impenitence of, unhappily, so many fine geniuses; may God forgive them! The life of this really great man betrayed many pettinesses, to use the phrase of enemies anxious to diminish his reputation, but which it would be more correct to call apparent contradictions. Never having had any cognizance of the motives on which men of higher intellect act, the envious or stupid immediately seize upon some superficial contradictions in order to draw up an indictment on which they obtain a momentary verdict. If, later on, success crowns the combinations they have attacked, by demonstrating the relation of the preparations to the results, still a few of their advance guard calumnies always survive. Thus in our own time, Napoleon was condemned by his contemporaries when he stretched out the wings of his eagle over England; 1822 was necessary to explain 1804 and the flat-bottom boats at Boulogne.

In the case of Despleins, his reputation and scientific knowledge being unassailable, his enemies found ground for attack in his extraordinary temper and his moral character; as a matter of fact, he certainly did possess that quality which the English call "eccentricity." At times he dressed superbly, like Crebillon, the tragic writer, than all at once he would affect a strange indifference in the matter of clothes; sometimes he appeared in a carriage, sometimes on foot. He was by turns

brusque and kind, though apparently hard and stingy; yet he was capable of offering his fortune to his masters when they were in exile, and they actually did him the honor of accepting it for a few days. No man has been the object of more contradictory judgments. Although for the sake of a *cordon noir*, which physicians have no business to solicit, he was capable of dropping a book of Hours out of his pocket at Court, it is certain that, inwardly, he laughed at the whole thing. He had a profound contempt for mankind, for he had studied them from above and below; he had caught them with their true expressions in the midst of the most serious and of the pettiest actions of life. The qualities of a great man are often consolidate. If among these giants one has more talent than *esprit*, still his *esprit* has a wider range than that of a man whom one simply calls "a man of *esprit*." All genius presupposes intuition; this intuition may be directed to some special subject; but a man who can see a flower must be able to see the sun. The doctor who is asked by a courtier whose life he has saved, "How is the Emperor?" and answers, "The courtier is recovering, the man will follow!" is not only a surgeon or a physician, he is also prodigiously *spirituel*. Thus the close and patient observer of humanity will justify the exorbitant pretensions of Despleins, and will believe him—as he believed himself—to have been as capable of making quite as great a minister as he was a surgeon.

Among the enigmas which the life of Des-

pleins offer, to the eyes of his contemporaries, we have chosen one of the most interesting, because the point comes at the end of the story, and will answer accusations which have been made against him. Of all the pupils that Despleins had at his hospital, Horace Bianchon was one of those to whom he was most warmly attached. Before going into residence at the Hotel Dieu, Horace Bianchon was a student of medicine, and lodged in le quartier Latin at a wretched *pension*, known under the name of La Maison Vauquer. At this place the poor youth experienced the pangs of that acute poverty which acts as a sort of cresset from which young men of great talent should come forth refined and incorruptible, like diamonds which can be subjected to any shock without breaking. In the violent flames of passions, just freed from restraint, they acquire habits of the most unswerving probity, and accustom themselves by means of the constant labor wherewith they have baffled and confined their appetites to those struggles which await on genius. Horace was a straightforward young man, incapable of double-dealing in a question of honor, going straight to the point without palavering, and as ready to pawn his cloak for a friend as to give him his working time or his evenings. He was one of those friends who do not trouble themselves about what they receive in exchange for what they give, being certain of receiving in their turn more than they have given. Most of his friends had that inward respect for him which unobtrusive goodness inspires, and many

of them were afraid of his censure. But Horace displayed his good qualities without priggishness. He was neither a Puritan nor a preacher; and he swore with a will when he gave advice, and was quite ready to take his slice of good cheer if the occasion offered. He was good company, not more prudish than a trooper, open and straightforward—not like a salior—a sailor nowadays is a wily diplomatist—but like a fine young man who has nothing in his life to hide, he held his head high, and walked on with a light heart. In fact, to sum up everything in a word, Horace was the Pylades of more than one Orestes—creditors serving nowadays as the nearest representation of the ancient Furies. He wore his poverty with that gaiety which is perhaps one of the greatest elements of courage, and, like all those who have nothing, he contracted few debts. As sober as a camel, and as watchful as a stag, his ideas and his conduct were equally unwavering. The happiness of Bianchon's life began on the day on which the famous surgeon received a proof of the faults and good qualities which, the one as much as the other, made Doctor Horace Bianchon doubly precious to his friends. When the chief clinical lecturer takes a young man under his wing, that young man has, as they say, his foot in the stirrup. Despleins did not fail to take Bianchon with him as his assistant to wealthy houses, where some present almost always found its way into the pupil's purse, and where the mysteries of Parisian life were insensibly revealed to his provincial experience. He kept him in his

study during consultations, and gave him employment there. Sometimes he would send him to accompany a rich patient to the baths. In fact, he nursed a practice for him. Consequently, at the end of a certain time, the despot of surgery had a *seïd*. These two men, one at the height of his celebrity and at the head of his own science, enjoying an immense fortune and an immense reputation; the other, a humble Omega, without either fortune or fame—became intimates. The great Despleins told his assistant everything. He knew if such and such a woman had sat on a chair by the master, or on the famous couch which stood in the study, and on which he slept. He knew thoroughly the great man's temperament—half lion, half bull—which at last developed and amplified his bust to such a degree as to cause his death by enlargement of the heart. He studied the strange corners of that busy life, the projects of its sordid avarice, the hopes of the politician hidden beneath the *savant;* he could foresee the deceptions which awaited the one sentiment buried in a heart not so much bronzen as bronzed.

One day Bianchon told Despleins that a poor water-carrier of le quartier Saint Jacques had a terrible illness caused by fatigue and poverty; the poor Auvergnat had eaten nothing but potatoes during the great winter of 1821. Despleins left all his patients; he flew, at the risk of breaking his horse's wind, followed by Bianchon, to the poor man's lodgings, and himself had him carried into the private hospital

founded by the celebrated Dubois, in le faubourg Saint Denis. He went and attended the man, and when he had cured him gave him the necessary sum to buy a horse and a water-cart. This Auvergnat was remarkable for an original trait. One of his friends fell ill, so he promptly brought him to his benefactor, saying, "I could not bear for him to go to any one else."

Despleins, crabbed as he was, grasped the water-carrier's hand, and said, "Bring them all to me." Then he got this son of Le Cantal taken in at the Hotel Dieu and took the greatest care of him while he was there. Bianchon had already several times noticed in his chief a predilection for Auvergnats, and especially for water-carriers; but as Despleins made his duties at the Hotel Dieu a sort of point of honor, he did not see anything so very strange in it. One day as Bianchon was crossing la place Saint Sulpice, he caught sight of his master going into the church. Despleins, who at that time never went a step out of his *cabriolet*, was on foot, and slipped out of la rue du Petit Lion as if he had been into a house of doubtful reputation. Naturally seized with curiosity, the assistant, who knew his master's opinions, and was *un cabaniste en dyable* (with a *y*, which seems in Rabelais to imply superiority in *devylrie*), slipped also into Saint Sulpice. He was not a little astonished at seeing the great Despleins—that atheist without pity for the angels, because they offer no resistance to the bistoury, and cannot have either fistulas or gastritis;—in fact, the dauntless *désireur* kneel-

ing humbly on his knees, and where? In the chapel of the Virgin, at which he was hearing a mass. He gave for the expenses of the ceremony, he gave for the poor, as serious all the time as if he had been performing an operation. "He can't be come to throw light on questions relative to the parturition of the Virgin," said Bianchon, whose astonishment was boundless. "If I had seen him holding one of the tassels of the canopy of Corpus Christi, it would only have been a joke; but at his hour, alone, without any one to see!—it certainly is something to think about." Bianchon did not like to appear to be spying upon the first surgeon of the Hotel Dieu, so he went away. It chanced that Despleins had invited him to dinner that very day, not at his own house, but at a restaurant. At dessert Bianchon succeeded by skilful maneuvering in bringing the conversation round to the subject of the mass, which he pronounced a mummery and a farce. "It's a farce," said Despleins, "which has cost Christianity more blood than all the battles of Napoleon, and all the leeches of Broussais! The mass is a Papal invention, based on *Hoc est corpus*, and does not go back further than the sixteenth century. What torrents of blood had to be shed in order to establish the observance of Corpus Christi! By the institution of this feast the Court of Rome was determined to mark its victory in the question of the real Presence—a schism which troubled the Church for three centuries. The Waldenses and the Albigenses refused to accept the innovation, and the wars of le Comte de Toulouse and the Al-

bigenses are the conclusion of the whole affair." In fact, Despleins revelled in giving vent to all his atheistic caprices; he poured forth a flood of Voltarian pleasantry, or to be exact—a horrible parody of *Le Citateur*.

"Ho! ho!" said Bianchon to himself. "What has become of my morning *dévot?*" He kept silence; he doubted whether it was his chief that he had seen at Saint Sulpice. Despleins would not have taken the trouble to lie to Bianchon; they knew each other too well; they had already exchanged thoughts on equally serious subjects, and discussed systems *de natura rerum*, probing or dissecting them with the knives and scalpel of incredulity. Three months passed; Bianchon did not follow this up, although the fact remained stamped in his memory. One day during the year, one of the physicians of the Hotel Dieu took Despleins by the arm in Bianchon's presence, as if to ask him a question.

"What were you going to do at Saint Sulpice, *mon cher Maître?*" said he.

"I went there to see a priest who has *caries* of the knee, whom Madame la Duchesse d'Angouleme did me the honor to recommend to me," said Despleins.

The doctor was satisfied with this excuse—not so Bianchon.

"Oh! he goes to see bad knees in the church, does he? He went to hear his mass," said he to himself. He determined to watch Despleins. He made a note of the day and the hour when he had caught him going into Saint Sulpice, and determined to be there the year following at

the same day and hour to see if he could catch him again. If he did, the regular recurrence of his devotion would justify a scientific investigation, for it would not be becoming in so great a man to show a direct contradiction between his thought and his action. The following year, at the day and hour named, Bianchon, who was by this time Despleins's assistant no longer, saw his friend's *cabriolet* stopping at the corner of la rue de Tournon and la rue du Petit Lion; from there Despleins crept jesuitically along the walls of Saint Sulpice, and again heard his mass at the altar of the Virgin. It certainly was Despleins! the chief surgeon, the atheist *in petto*, the chance *dévot*. The plot was thickening. The famous *savant's* persistency complicated it all. When Despleins had gone out, Bianchon went up to the sacristan who had come to invest the chapel, and asked him whether the gentleman was a regular attendant there.

"I have been here for twenty years," said the sacristan, "and all that time Monsieur Despleins has come four times a year to hear this mass; he founded it himself."

"A foundation by him!" said Bianchon, as he walked way. "It's as great a mystery as the Immaculate Conception—a thing of itself to make a doctor incredulous."

Some time passed by before Doctor Bianchon, although he was Desplein's friend, was in a position to talk to him of this strange incident in his life. If they met in consultation or in society, it was difficult to find that moment

of confidence and solitude when one sits with one's feet on the fire-dogs and one's head resting on the back of an armchair, when two men tell each other their secrets. At last, seven years later, after the Revolution of 1830, when the people rushed upon the Archbishop's palace, when Republican inspiration drove them to destroy the gilded crosses that flashed up like lightning in this immense ocean of houses, when disbelief side by side with sedition stalked the streets, Bianchon caught Despleins again going into Saint Sulpice. The doctor followed, and took a place near his friend without his making him the least sign or showing the least surprise. They heard the votive mass together.

"Tell me, *mon cher*," said Bianchon to Despleins, when they were outside the church, "what is the reason for this *capucinade* of yours? I have now caught you three times going to mass—*you!* You must give me a reason for this mysterious proceeding, and explain the flagrant inconsistency between your opinions and your practice. You don't believe in God, and yet you go to mass! My dear master, you are really bound to answer me."

"I am like many *dévots*, men profoundly religious in appearance, but quite as much atheists as we are, you and I."

Then came a torrent of epigrams on certain political personages, the best known of whom represent in this century a second edition of Molière's *tartuffe*.

"I did not ask for all that," said Bianchon. "I want to know the reason for what you have

just been doing here; why did you found this mass?"

"*Ma fois, mon cher ami,*" said Despleins. "I am on the brink of the grave, so it is as well that I should speak to you of the beginning of my life."

At this moment Bianchon and the great man happened to be in la rue des Quatre-Vents, one of the most horrible streets in Paris. Despleins pointed to the sixth story of one of those houses like an obelisk, with a side door opening into an alley, at the end of which is a tortuous staircase lit by inside lights,—well named, *jours de souffrance.* It was a greenish-colored house; on the basement lived a furniture dealer, who seemed to lodge a different misery on each of his floors. Despleins raised his arm with an emphatic gesture and said to Bianchon: "I lived up there for two years!"

"I know it; d'Arthez lived there. I used to come here almost every day when I was a youth; we used to call it '*Le bocal aux grands hommes.*' Well?"

"The mass that I have just heard is connected with events which took place at the time when I lived in the garret in which you tell me d'Arthez used to live; the one with the window where the line with the clothes on it is floating over the pot of flowers. I had such a rough start, my dear Bianchon, that I can dispute the palm of the sufferings of Paris with any one. I have endured everything: hunger, thirst, want of money, of clothes, of boots and shoes, and of linen—all the hardest phases of poverty. I have blown on my numbed fingers in that '*bocal*

aux grands hommes'—I should like to go with you and see it again. I worked through one winter when I could see my head steaming and a cloud of my own breath rising as you see the breath of horses on a frosty day. I do not know where a man gets his support from to enable him to offer any resistance to such a life. I was alone, without help, without a soul either to buy books or to pay the expenses of my medical education. Not having a friend, my irritable, gloomy, restless temperament stood in my way. No one was willing to see in my irritability the labors and difficulties of a man who, from the bottom of the social state where he is, is toiling to reach the surface. But—I can say this to *you;* before you I have no need of disguise—I had that foundation of noble sentiments and vivid sensibility which will always be the appanage of men who are strong enough to climb to any summit whatever, after having trudged for a long time through the sloughs of poverty. I could get nothing from my family, nor my home, beyond the meager allowance they made me. At this time then, all I had to eat in the morning was a little loaf which the baker in la rue du Petit Lion sold me cheaper, because it had been baked the evening before, or the evening before that. This I crumbled into some milk; so my morning meal only cost me two *sous.* I only dined every other day, at a *pension* where the dinner cost sixteen *sous.* In this way I only spent nine *sous* a day. You know as well as I do what care I had to take of my clothes, and my boots and shoes! I don't know whether we feel later as much

trouble over the treason of a comrade as we feel—you have felt it too—at the sight of the mocking grin of a shoe that is coming unsewed, or at the sound of a split in the lining of an overcoat. I drank nothing but water. I had the greatest respect for the *cafés*. Zoppi seemed to me a sort of Promised Land where the Luculli of the *pays latin* alone had rights of presence. Should I ever be able, I said to myself sometimes, to take a cup of coffee and cream there, and play a game of dominoes? Well, I carried into my work the fever with which my poverty inspired me. I tried to acquire positive details of knowledge, that I might possess an immense personal value, and so deserve the place I was to reach on the day when I passed out of my state of nothingness. I consumed more oil than bread; the light that lit me during those stubborn nights cost me more than my food. The struggle was long, obstinate, and without any consolation. I awoke no sympathy about me. In order to make friends, a young man must mix with his fellows, possess a few *sous* to be able to go and drink with them, and go with them everywhere where students do go! I had nothing! and no one in Paris realizes what a nothing 'nothing' is. If ever there was an occasion which might betray my poverty, I experienced that nervous contraction of the gullet which makes a patient believe that a ball is rising up into the larynx out of the œsophagus. Later on I met those people who were born rich, who have never wanted for anything, and do not know the problem of this rule of three: '*A young man is to*

crime as a hundred sou piece is to ×.' These gilded idiots say to me: 'Then why did you get into debt? Why did you contract such onerous obligations?' They remind me of the princess who, knowing that the people were starving for bread, said: 'Why don't they buy *brioches?*' I should very much like to see one of these rich people, who complain that I charge them too much for operating—yes, I should like to see him alone in Paris without a *sou* or a scrap of baggage, without a friend and without credit, forced to work with his five fingers to live. What would he do? Where would he go to stay his hunger? Bianchon, if you have seen me sometimes hard and bitter, it was that I was laying my former troubles upon the callousness and egoism of which I have had thousands of proofs in high quarters; or I may have been thinking of the obstacles that hate and envy and jealousy and calumny have raised between me and success. At Paris, as soon as certain people see you ready to put your foot in the stirrup, some of them catch you by your coat tail; others loose the buckle of the girth so that you may fall and break your head; another takes the shoes off your horse; another steals your whip; the least treacherous is the one you can see coming to shoot you, with the muzzle of his pistol close to you. You have enough talent, *mon cher enfant*, to know very soon the horrible, incessant warfare that mediocrity wages against a man of greater power. If you lose twenty-five *louis* one evening, the next morning you will be accused of being a gambler, and your best friends will say that the night

before you lost twenty-five thousand *francs*. If your head is bad, you will pass for a lunatic. If you feel irritable, you will be unbearable. If, in order to resist this army of pigmies, you collect your superior forces, your best friends will cry out that you want to eat up everything, that you think you have a right to domineer and play the tyrant. In short, your good qualities will become faults, your faults will become vices and your vices will be crimes. If you have saved a man, you will have killed him; if your patient recovers, it will be certain that you have assured the present at the expense of the future; if he is not dead, he will die. Stumble, and you will have fallen. Invent whatever you will, claim your just rights, you will be a sharp man, a man difficult to deal with, a man who won't let young men get on. So you see, *mon cher*, if I do not believe in God, much less do I believe in man. You recognize in me, don't you, an entirely different Despleins from the Despleins whom every one abuses? But don't let us stir up the mud! Well, I lived in that house; I was hard at work so as to be able to pass my first examination; I hadn't got a stiver. I had come to one of those last extremities when, you know, a man says, 'I must enlist.' I had one hope. I was expecting a trunk full of linen from my home—a present from one of those old aunts who, knowing nothing about Paris, think of one's shirts, under the idea that with thirty *francs* a month their nephew lives on ortolans. The trunk arrived while I was at the school; the carriage cost forty *francs*. The porter, a German shoemaker, who lodged in a

loft, had paid the money and kept the trunk. I went for a walk in la rue des Fosses Saint Germain des Prés, and in la rue de l'Ecole de Médecin, but I could not invent a stratagem which would deliver me up my trunk, without my being obliged to give the forty *francs*, which I should naturally have paid after having sold the linen. My stupidity in this taught me that I had no other vocation than surgery. Delicate minds which exercise their power in a lofty sphere are wanting in that spirit of intrigue which is so fertile in resource and combination; *their* talent is chance; they do not seek—they *find*. Well, at night I returned. My neighbor, a water-carrier, named Bourgeat, a man from Saint Flour, was going in at the same moment. We knew each other in the way that two lodgers get to know each other who have rooms at the same landing and hear each other sleeping, coughing, and dressing, until at last they get used to one another. My neighbor informed me that the landlord, whom I owed for three terms, had turned me out; I had to pack off on the following day. He himself had notice to quit on account of his trade. The night I spent was the most miserable in my life. Where was I to get a messenger to carry my few belongings and my books? How was I to pay a messenger and the carter? Where was I to go to? I asked myself these unanswerable questions again and again, through my tears, like madmen repeating their refrains. I fell asleep. Poverty has a divine sleep of its own, full of beautiful dreams. The next morning, while I was eating my bowl of bread crumbled

into milk, Bourgeat comes in and says in his bad French:

"'*Monchieur l'Etudiant*, I'm a poor fellow, a foundling from the hospital at *Chian* Flour; I've no father or mother, and I've never been rich enough to marry. You've not a lot of people belonging to you neither; you've not got anything to speak of. Look here, I've got a hand-cart down below which I've hired for two *sous* an hour. It'll hold all our things; if you're agreeable, we'll look out for a place where we can lodge together, as we're driven out of this. After all it's not such a paradise on earth.'

"'I know that, my good Bourgeat,' I said; 'but I am in great difficulties. Down below I have got a trunk containing linen worth a hundred *écus;* with that I should be able to pay the landlord and also what I owe the porter, but I haven't got a hundred *sous*.'

"H'm! I've got some *chink*,' he answered cheerfully, showing me a filthy old leather purse. 'You'd better keep your linen.'

"Bourgeat paid for me three terms and his own, and settled with the porter. Then he put our furniture and my linen onto his barrow and pushed it through the streets, stopping before every house where there was a placard hung out. *I* went up to see if the place to let would be likely to suit us. At midday we were still wandering about le quartier Latin without having found anything. The price was a great obstacle. Bourgeat proposed that we should dine at a wine shop; we left our barrow at the door.

"Toward evening I discovered in la cour de Bohan, passage du Commerce, two rooms sep-

arated by a staircase, at the top of a house, under the tiles. We could have lodgings for sixty *francs* a year each. Here then we settled down, I and my humble friend. We dined together. Bourgeat, who earned about fifty *sous* a day, possessed about a hundred *écus*. He would soon have been able to realize his ambition and buy a horse and water-cart. When he discovered my situation, for he could draw out my secrets with a depth of cunning and a kindness the memory of which even now touches my heart, he gave up for some time the ambition of his whole life. Bourgeat had worked in the streets since he was twenty-two; he sacrificed his hundred *écus* to my future."

Here Despleins pressed Bianchon's arm.

"He gave me the necessary money for my examinations. He understood, *mon ami*, that I had a mission—that the needs of my intelligence exceeded his own. He took charge of me; he called me his *petit;* he lent me the money necessary for my purchases of books; sometimes he would come in very quietly to watch me at work; in short, he took all the care of me that a mother would that I might be able to have wholesome nourishment instead of the bad and insufficient food to which I had been condemned.

"Bourgeat was a man of about forty, with the face of a medieval burgher, a prominent forehead, and a head that a painter might have taken as a model for Lycurgus. The poor man felt his heart big with dormant affection, he had never been loved except by a poodle, which

had died a short time before. He was always talking to me about it, and used to ask me if I thought that the Church would consent to say masses for the repose of its soul. He said his dog was a true Christian; it had accompanied him to church for twelve years without ever having barked. It listened to the organ without opening its mouth, sitting quietly by him with an air which made him believe that it was praying with him. This man centered all his affections on me; he accepted me as a being who came in trouble; he became the most attentive of mothers to me, the most delicate of benefactors—in short, the ideal of that virtue which delights in its own work. If I met him in the streets he cast on me a look of intelligence full of inconceivable nobleness. On these occasions he walked as if he were carrying nothing; it seemed to make him happy to see me in good health and well clad. In fact, his was the devotion of the people, the love of the *grisette*, carried into a higher sphere. He did my commissions, woke me at night at certain hours, cleaned my lamp, and polished our landing: he was as good a servant as he was a father, as neat as an English girl. He kept house; like Philopœmen, he sawed up our wood; doing everything in a simple way of his own without ever compromising his dignity, for he seemed to feel that the end he had in view could ennoble whatever he did. When I left this good man to enter at the Hotel Dieu as a resident, I cannot describe the sadness and gloom he felt at the thought that he could no longer live with me; but he consoled himself with the prospect

of saving up the money necessary for the expenses of my thesis, and made me promise to come on the days when we had leave, to see him. He was proud of me; he loved me for my own sake, and for his own too. If you were to look up my thesis, you would see that it was dedicated to him. During the last year of my term of residence I had earned enough money to repay the noble Auvergnat all I owed him, by buying him a horse and water-cart. He was furiously angry to think that I was depriving myself of the money, and yet enchanted at seeing his wishes realized; he laughed and scolded me together, looking at the horse and water-cart, and saying, as he wiped away a tear, 'It's too bad. Oh! what a splendid cart! you ought not to have done it. . . . The horse is as strong as an Auvergnat.' I never saw anything more touching than this scene. Bourgeat absolutely insisted on buying me the case of instruments mounted in silver which you have seen in my study; to me it is the most precious thing I possess. Although elated at my first success, he never let the least word escape him or the least sign that implied: 'This man is due to me.' And yet without him poverty would have killed me. The poor man was killing himself for me; he had eaten nothing but bread rubbed with garlic, so that I might have enough coffee for my vigils. He fell ill. As you may imagine, I spent the nights at his bedside; I pulled him through the first time, but he had a relapse two years afterward, and in spite of the most devoted care, in spite of the greatest efforts of science, he had to give in.

No king was ever nursed as he was. Yes, Bianchon, I tried things unheard of before to snatch that life from death. I would have made him live, as much as anything that he might witness his own work, that I might realize all his prayers for him, that I might satisfy the only feeling of gratitude that has ever filled my heart and extinguish a fire which burns me even now."

"Bourgeat," continued Despleins, who was visibly moved, after a pause, "my second father, died in my arms. He left me everything he possessed by a will he had had made by a scrivener, dated the year when we went to lodge in la cour de Rohan. He had all the faith of a charcoal burner; he loved the Blessed Virgin as he would have loved his wife. Though he was an ardent Catholic, he had never said a word to me about my irreligion. He besought me, when he was in danger, to spare no pains that he might have the assistance of the Church. He would often express to me during the night fears as to his future; he was afraid that he had not lived a holy enough life. Poor man! he toiled from morning till night. To whom else could Paradise, if there is a Paradise, belong? He received the sacraments like the saint he was, and his death was worthy of his life. No one followed his funeral except me. When I had placed my only benefactor in the earth, I pondered how I could perform my obligations to him. I remembered that he had no family, or friends, or wife, or children; but he believed; he had a religious conviction. Had I any right to dispute it? He had spoken to me

timidly about masses said for the repose of the dead. He had not chosen to impose that duty upon me, thinking that it would be like asking for a return for his devotion. As soon as I could establish a foundation, I gave the necessary sum to Saint Sulpice for having four masses a year said here. As the only thing I could offer Bourgeat in satisfaction of his pious wishes, I go in his name, on the day on which this mass is said at the beginning of every season, and recite for him the necessary prayers. I say with the good faith of a doubter: 'My God, if there is a sphere where Thou puttest after their death those who have been perfect, think of good Bourgeat; and if there is anything for him to suffer, give me his sufferings that he may enter more quickly into what is called Paradise.' That, *mon cher*, is all that a man of my opinions can allow himself. God must be *un bon diable;* he could not be annoyed with me. I swear to you I would give my fortune for the belief of Bourgeat to enter into my brain." Bianchon, who attended Despleins in his last illness, dares not affirm now that the celebrated surgeon died an atheist. Those who believe will like to think that the humble Auvergnat will have come to open to him the door of Heaven, as he formerly opened to him the door of that eartnly temple over which is written, *Aux grands hommes la patrie reconnaissante.*

AN ACCURSED HOUSE

(*A Story related by Horace Bianchon*)

On the banks of the Loire, about a stone's throw from Vendôme stands an old brown house, with a very steep roof. Even the stinking tanyards and the wretched taverns found on the outskirts of almost all small towns have no place here; the isolation is complete. At the back of this dwelling, leading down to the bank of the river, is a garden. The box, once clipped to mark the walks, grows now as it will; some willows sprung from the Loire have formed a boundary with their rapid growth, and almost hide the house; plants which we call weeds make the sloping bank beautiful with their luxuriant growth; the fruit trees, unpruned for ten years, form a thicket with their suckers, and yield no harvest; the espaliers have grown as bushy as a hedge of elms; paths once sanded are covered with purslain—or rather, of the paths themselves there is left no trace. From the brow of the hill hang, as it were the ruins of the ancient castle of the Dukes of Vendôme; it is the only place whence the eye can penetrate into this retreat.

It is said that this strip of land was once—at a date difficult to fix exactly—the delight of a gentleman who spent his time in the cultivation of roses and tulips; in fact, in horticulture generally, especially devoting himself to the rarer fruits. An arbor—or rather, the ruins of one—is still visible, and in it a table which time has not yet entirely destroyed. The sight

of this garden which is no more reminds one of the negative enjoyment of life spent peacefully in the county, just as one guesses at the story of a successful merchant from the epitaph on his tomb. To complete the sad and sweet thoughts which fasten here upon the soul, one of the walls bears a sun dial inscribed with this legend, "Ultimam cogita"—such is the reminder of its somewhat matter-of-fact Christianity. The roofs of this house are utterly ruinous, the shutters are always closed, the balconies full of swallows' nests, the doors forever shut; tall grasses etch with their green outline the cracks in the pavement, the bolts are red with rust. Summer and winter the sun and the moon and the snow have cracked the wood and shrunk the planks and gnawed away the paint. Here silence and gloom hold their untroubled sway, only birds, and cats, and rats, and mice, and martins roam here unmolested, and fight their battles, and prey upon each other. Over all an invisible hand has written the one word—*Mystery*.

If you were driven by your curiosity to go round and look at the house on the other side, from the road, you would notice a wide-arched door, through which the children of the neighborhood have made plenty of peep-holes—I learned afterward that this door had been past repair ten years before—and through these irregular chinks you could see the perfect harmony there is between the garden front and the front looking on to the courtyard. Here is the same reign of disorder—the flagstones are edged with tufts of grass, enormous cracks

run like furrows over the walls, the blackened coping is interlaced with festoons of countless wall plants, the stones of the steps are unjointed, the gutters are broken, the cord of the bell has rotted away. Has fire from heaven passed through this dwelling? Did some tribunal decree that this habitation should be sown with salt? Has man betrayed France in this place —insulted God? These are the questions one asks here; only the reptiles writhe and answer not. This empty, desolate house is a vast enigma, and no man knows the clue. It was formerly a small manor, and bears the name of La Grande Brétèche. During my stay at Vendôme, where Despleins had left me to take care of a rich patient, the sight of this strange dwelling became one of my keenest pleasures. It was more than a ruin; to a ruin are attached at least some remembrances of incontestable authenticity; but this habitation, still standing, slowly decaying beneath an avenging hand, held within it a secret—a thought unknown. At the least its mere existence was the sign of some strange caprice. Many a time of an evening I resolutely approached the now wild hedgerow which protected the enclosure. I braved the tearing thorns, and trod this garden without an owner, and entered this possession no longer public or private. I stayed there whole hours gazing upon its disorder. Not even for the sake of learning the story—which I felt certain would give an explanation of this strange scene—would I have made a single inquiry of any of the gossips of Vendôme. There I composed charming romances; I gave myself

up to little debauches of melancholy which delighted my heart. If I had known the cause of this desertion (perhaps a commonplace story enough), I should have lost the intoxication of these my unpublished poems. To me this retreat represented the most varied pictures of human life, clouded by misery. Now it had the air of a cloister without inmates; now the peace of a cemetery without the dead and all their chattering epitaphs; one day it was a lazar-house, the next the Palace of the Atridae; but above all it was the country with its hour-glass existence, and its conventional ideas. I have often wept, I never laughed there. More than once I felt an involuntary terror when I heard above my head the dull whir of the wings of some belated wood dove. There the soil is so dank you must defy the lizards and vipers and frogs that walk abroad in all the wild liberty of Nature. Above all, you must not mind the cold; at certain moments you feel as though a mantle of ice were cast upon your shoulders, like the commandant's hand upon Don Juan's neck.

One evening, just at the moment I was finishing a tragedy by which I was explaining to myself the phenomenon of this sort of woe in effigy, the wind turned an old rusty weather-cock, and the cry it gave forth sounded like a groan bursting from the depth of the house; I shivered with terror.

I returned to my inn overpowered with gloomy thoughts. When I had supped, my hostess came with a mysteious air into my room,

and said, "Monsieur, Monsieur Regnault is here." "Who is Monsieur Regnault?" "Why! does not Monsieur know Monsieur Regnault? Ah, that's very odd," she said, and went away. Suddenly I saw before me a long, lean man; he entered the room like a ram gathering itself up to butt at a rival; he presented a receding forehead, a little pointed head, and a sallow face, not unlike a glass of dirty water; he might have passed for a ministerial beadle. This man, who was quite unknown to me, wore a black coat, very much worn at the seams, but he had a diamond in the bosom of his shirt and gold rings in his ears.

"Monsieur, whom have I the honor of addressing?" said I. He seated himself on a chair, arranged himself before my fire, placed his hat on my table, rubbed his hands together and said, "Ah! it's very cold. Monsieur, I am Monsieur Regnault." I bowed, saying to myself, "Il bondo cani! let's see."

"I am," said he, "a notary in Vendôme." "I am charmed to hear it, Monsieur," said I, "but I am not in a position to make a will, for reasons known to myself." "Just one moment!" he replied, raising his hand as if to impose silence. "Allow me, Monsieur, allow me! I learn that you have occasionally gone to walk in the garden of La Grande Brétèche." "Yes, Monsieur." "Just one moment," said he, repeating his gesture; "this of itself constitutes an actionable offence. Monsieur, I am come in the name and as executor under the will of Madame, the late Comtesse de Merret,

to request you to discontinue your visits. Just one moment! I am no Turk; I do not wish to make a crime of it; besides, you may very well be ignorant of the circumstances which oblige me to allow the finest mansion in Vendôme to fall into ruins. However, Monsieur, you appear to be a man of education, and you ought to know that the laws forbid trespass on an enclosed estate under heavy penalties. A hedge is as good as a wall. However, the state in which the house now stands may serve as an excuse for your curiosity. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to leave you free to come and go as you please in the house; but, charged as I am to carry out the wishes of the testatrix, I have the honor, Monsieur, to request you not to enter that garden again. Monsieur, since the opening of the will I have not myself set foot in that house, though it belongs—as I had the honor of informing you—to the estate of Madame de Merret. All we did was to make an inventory of the doors and windows, in order to assess the taxes, which I pay annually out of capital destined by the late Madame la Comtesse for that purpose. Ah, my dear Monsieur, her will made a great talk in Vendôme!"

Here the worthy man stopped to blow his nose. I respected his loquacity, understanding perfectly that the estate of Madame de Merret was the most important event in his life—his whole reputation, his glory, his *restoration*. Then, after all, I must say good-bye to my fine reveries and romances. However, I

did not rebel against the satisfaction of learning the truth in an official manner.

"Monsieur," I said, "would it be indiscreet if I asked you the reason for this eccentricity?"

At these words a look expressing all the pleasure of a man accustomed to mounting his hobby passed over the notary's face. He pulled up his shirt collar with a sort of self-satisfied air, took out his snuff-box, opened it, offered me some snuff, and on my refusal seized a large pinch himself. He was happy! The man who has not got a hobby knows nothing of the profit one can get out of life. A hobby is the exact mean between passion and monomania. At this moment I understood that champing expression of Sterne's in all its meaning. I had a complete idea of the joy with which, by the aid of *Trim*, *Uncle Toby* bestrode his charger.

"Monsieur," said Monsieur Regnault, "I was formerly senior clerk to Maître Roguin, in Paris—an excellent office. Perhaps you have heard speak of it? No! Well, a most unfortunate bankruptcy rendered it notorious. Not having sufficient capital to carry on business in Paris, considering the price to which practices went up in 1816, I came here and purchased the office of my predecessor. I had relations here in Vendôme, among others a very rich aunt who gave me her daughter in marriage. Monsieur," he continued after a slight pause, "three months after I had been enrolled before *Monseigneur le Garde des*

sceaux, I was summoned one night just as I was going to bed (this was before my marriage) by Madame la Comtesse de Merret to her chateau, le Chateau de Merret. Her lady's maid, a fine young woman, now servant in this hotel, was at my door in Madame la Comtesse's *caleche*. Ah! just one moment! I ought to have told you, Monsieur, that Monsieur le Comte de Merret had gone to Paris, and died there two months before I came here. He died miserably, having given himself up to every kind of excess. You understand? The day of his departure Madame la Comtesse had left La Grande Bretèche and had it dismantled. Some people even declare that she burned all the furniture, hangings—*in short, all the goods and chattels generally whatsoever adorning the premises now in the tenancy of the said sieur* —(Dear me, what am I saying? Beg pardon, I was thinking I was drawing up a lease.) Yes," he repeated, "they say she had them burned in the meadow at Merret. Have you been to Merret, Monsieur? No," said he, answering the question himself. "Ah! it's a very fine place! For about three months before, Monsieur le Comte and Madame la Comtesse had been living in a strange manner. They no longer received any one; Madame lived on the ground floor and Monsieur on the first story. After Madame la Comtesse was left alone, she never showed herself again, except at church; later she refused to see her friends who came to visit her at home in her chateau. She was already very much changed

when she left La Grande Brétèche and went to live at Merret. The dear woman (I say 'dear' because this diamond comes to me from her, otherwise I never saw her but once). Well, the good lady was very ill. No doubt she had given up all hope of recovery, for she died without wishing any doctors to be called in; indeed. many of our ladies here thought that she was not quite right in the head. As you may imagine then, Monsieur, my curiosity was especially excited when I was informed that Madame de Merret needed my assistance—and I was not the only person who took interest in this story.

"Although it was late, the whole town knew that same evening that I had gone to Merret. On the road I addressed a few questions to the lady's maid, but her answers were very vague; however, she told me that the curé of Merret had come during the day and administered the Last Sacraments to her mistress, and that it seemed impossible that she could live through the night. I arrived at the *chateau* about eleven o'clock. I went up the great staircase; then, after traversing vast, gloomy apartments, cold and damp enough for the devil, I reached the principal bed-chamber, where Madame la Comtesse lay. After all the reports that had been going about (I should never have finished, Monsieur, if I were to repeat all the stories that are told about her), I expected to see a sort of coquette. Just fancy, I had the greatest difficulty to discover at all where she was, in the great bed in

which she lay. True, she had one of those antique Argant lamps for light, but the chamber was enormous, with an *ancien régime frise* so covered with dust that the very sight of it made one cough. Ah! but you've not been to Merret! Well! Monsieur, the bed is one of those old-fashioned ones, with a high canopy trimmed with figured chintz. A small night table stood by the bedside, and I noticed on it a *Following of Christ*, which, by the way, I afterward bought for my wife, as well as the lamp; there was also a large couch for her confidential servant, and two chairs. No fire, mind! This was all the furniture; it wouldn't have filled ten lines of an inventory. Ah, *mon cher Monsieur*, if you had seen, as I did then, this vast room, hung with brown, you would have fancied you had been transported into a scene of a romance come true. It was icy, more than icy—funereal," he added, raising his arm with a theatrical gesture and pausing. "After looking for some time and going close up to the bed, at last I discovered Madame de Merret, thanks to the lamplight which fell full upon her pillows. Her face was as yellow as wax; it was just like a pair of clasped hands. She had on a lace cap which showed her beautiful hair; then, it was as white as thread. She was sitting up, though she seemed to do so with great difficulty. Her great black eyes, dulled with fever no doubt, and already almost dead, scarcely moved under the bones where the eyebrows are—here!" said he, pointing to the

arch of his eyes. "Her brow was wet, her hands were fleshless, mere bones covered with a fine, tender skin; all her veins and muscles stood out prominently. She must have been very beautiful once, but at the moment I was seized with a feeling—I don't know how—at the sight of her. The people who laid her out said they had never seen a creature so utterly fleshless alive. She really was terrible to behold! Disease had made such ravages upon her she was nothing more than a phantom. Her lips were a livid purple; they seemed motionless even when she spoke. Although my profession takes me now and again to the bedsides of the dying in order to ascertain their last wishes, so that I am not unfamiliar with these scenes, yet I must say that the lamentations of the families and the agonies of the dying which I have witnessed are as nothing compared to this desolate and silent woman in her vast *chateau.* I could not hear the faintest sound, I could not even see the least movement of the bedclothes from the breathing of the sick woman; I too stood perfectly motionless, absorbed in looking at her, in a sort of stupor. I could fancy I was there now. At last her great eyes moved; she tried to lift her hand, but it fell back on the bed, and these words passed out of her mouth like a sigh—her voice was a voice no more—'I have waited very impatiently for you.' Her cheeks flushed feverishly. It was a struggle for her to speak. 'Madame,' I said. She made me a sign to be silent, and at the same moment the

old housekeeper rose from her couch and whispered in my ear: 'Do not speak; Madame la Comtesse is not in a state to bear the least sound; if you spoke you might agitate her.' I sat down. After a few moments Madame de Merret gathered up all her remaining strength and moved her right arm; she put it with immense difficulty under her bolster; then she paused for a moment; then she made one last effort to draw out her hand; she took out a sealed paper, and as she did so the sweat fell in drops from her forehead. 'I entrust my will to you,' she said. 'Ah, my God, ah!' This was all. She seized the crucifix which lay on her bed, raised it quickly to her lips, and died. The expression of those motionless eyes makes me shudder still; she must have suffered terribly! There was joy in her last look, and the joy remained graven upon her dead eyes. I took away the will with me; when it was opened I found that Madame de Merret had named me her executor. She bequeathed the whole of her property to the hospital at Vendôme, with the exception of a few individual legacies. Her directions relative to La Grande Brétèche were as follows:—She directed me to leave the house for a period of fifty years—reckoned from the day of her death—in the exact state in which it should be found at the moment of her decease; she forbade any entry into the apartments by any person whatsoever, and also the least repair; she even set aside the interest of a certain sum wherewith, if necessary, to engage keep-

ers, in order to insure the fulfillment of her intentions in their entirety. At the expiration of this term of years, if the wishes of the testatrix have been carried out, the house is to pass to my heirs, for Monsieur is aware that notaries are not allowed to accept a legacy; if they are not carried out, La Grande Brétèche returns to the heirs-at-law, with the charge that they are to fulfill the conditions indicated in the codicil annexed to the will, which codicil is not to be opened until the expiration of the said fifty years. The will has never been disputed, and so——;" at this word, and without finishing his sentence, that oblong notary surveyed me with an air of triumph, and I made him quite happy by addressing him a few compliments. "Monsieur," I finished by saying to him, "you have made such a vivid impression upon me that I fancy I can see this dying woman paler than her own sheets; her gleaming eyes made me afraid; I shall dream of her tonight. But you will have formed some conjectures concerning the dispositions contained in this eccentric will?" "Monsieur," said he, with comic reserve, "I never allow myself to judge of the conduct of persons who have honored me with the gift of a diamond." I soon untied the tongue of the scrupulous notary, and he communicated to me, amid long digressions, all the observations made by the profound politicians of both sexes whose judgments are law in Vendôme. But these observations were so contradictory and so diffuse, that, in spite of the interest

which I took in this authentic history, I very nearly fell asleep. The notary, no doubt accustomed to listen to himself, and to make his clients and fellow-townsmen listen too, to his dull voice and monotonous intonation, began to triumph over my curiosity, when happily he got up to leave. "Ha, ha, Monsieur," said he, upon the staircase, "there are many people who would like to be alive in forty-five years' time, but—just one moment!" and he put the first finger of his right hand to his nose, as if to say, "Pay great attention to this," and said, in a sly way, "To get as far as that, one must start before sixty." I was drawn from my apathy by the last sally—the notary thought it prodigiously witty; then I shut my door, sat down in my armchair, and put my feet on the fire dogs of the grate. I was soon deep in a romance *a la* Ann Radcliffe, founded on the juridical hints given by Monsieur Regnault. Presently my door, handled by the dexterous hand of a woman, turned on its hinges; my hostess came in, a good-humored, jovial woman, who had missed her vocation; she was a Fleming, and ought to have been born in a picture by Teniers. "Well, Monsieur," said she, "I suppose Monsieur Regnault has been droning over his old story again about La Grande Brétèche?" "Yes, he has, *mère* Lepas." "What has he been telling you?" I repeated to her in a few words the gloomy, chilling story of Madame de Merret. After each sentence my hostess stretched out her neck and looked at me with an innkeeper's own shrewdness—a sort of happy

mean between the instinct of a gendarme, the craft of a spy, and the shiftiness of a shopkeeper. When I had finished I added, "My dear *dame* Lepas! you seem to me to know something more about it yourself, or else why should you have come up to see me?" "No, on my word of honor! as sure as my name's Lepas." "No, don't swear to it; your eyes are big with a secret. You knew Monsieur Merret; what was he like?" "Lord bless you, Monsieur de Merret was a fine man; you never got to the end of him, he was so long—a worthy gentleman come from Picardie, but, as we say here, '*Il avait la tête près du bonnet.*' He paid everything with ready money, so that he might never come to words with any one; you see he was a bit quick! Our ladies here all thought him very nice and pleasant." "Because he was quick?" said I. "Likely enough," said she. "You may imagine, Monsieur, there must have been a *something* about him, as they say, for Madame de Merret to have married him. I don't want to hurt the other ladies, but she was the richest and prettiest young lady in all Vendôme; she had near on twenty thousand *livres* a year. The whole town went to the wedding. The bride was a delicate, winning creature—a real jewel of a wife. Ah! they made a fine couple in their time!" "Were they happy together?" "Hm! perhaps they were and perhaps they weren't, as far as one could tell; but you can imagine they didn't hobnob with such as we. Madame de Merret made a good wife, and very kind. I dare say

she had a good bit to put up with at times from her husband's tantrums; but though he was a bit stern, we liked him well enough. Bah! it's his quality that made him like that; when a man's noble, you know——" "Then there must certainly have been some catastrophe for Monsieur and Madame de Merret to have separated so abruptly?" "I never said anything about a catastrophe, Monsieur I don't know anything about it." "All right! Now I am certain that you *do* know about it." "Well, Monsieur, I am going to tell you all I know. When I saw Monsieur Regnault go up to see you, I felt certain that he would talk to you about Madame de Merret, with reference to La Grande Brétèche. This put it into my head to consult Monsieur, for you seemed to me to be a comfortable man, who would not betray a poor woman like me that has never done harm to any one—and yet find myself tormented by my conscience. I have never up to now dared to open my mouth about it to the people in this place; they're all a pack of gossips with tongues like vinegar. In fact, Monsieur, I have never yet had a traveler stay in my house as long as you have, or any one to whom I could tell the history of the fifty thousand *francs*—" "My dear *dame* Lepas," I answered, checking the flow of her words. "if your confidence is of a nature to compromise me I wouldn't be burdened with it for all the world." "You needn't be afraid," said she, interrupting me, "you will see." This readiness made me think that I was not the only person

to whom our good hostess had communicated the secret of which I was to be the sole depository; however, I settled myself to listen. "Monsieur," said she, "when the Emperor sent some Spanish prisoners here—prisoners of war or others—I had one to lodge at the expense of the Government, a young Spaniard sent to Vendôme on parole. In spite of his parole, he had to go every day to report himself to the sub-prefect. He was a Spanish grandee—excuse me a minute—he bore a name ending in 'os' and 'dia.' I think it was Bagos de Feredia, but I wrote it down in my register; if you would like to, you can read it. Ah! he was a handsome young man for a Spaniard, who are all ugly—so they say. He couldn't have been more than five feet two or three inches, but he was well made. He had the smallest hands!—which he took such care of—you should have seen—he had as many brushes for his hands as a woman has for the whole of her toilet. He had long black hair, gleaming eyes, rather an olive complexion—but I admired that. He wore the finest linen I ever saw on any one—and I have had princesses to lodge here, and among others le Général Bertrand, le Duc and la Duchesse d'Abrantès, Monsieur Decazes, and the King of Spain. He did not eat much; but one couldn't be angry with him, he had such gentle, courteous manners. Oh! I was very fond of him, although he didn't say two words in the day; and one couldn't get the least conversation with him. If one tried to talk to him, he didn't answer. It was a fad—a

mania; they're all like it, so I'm told. He read his breviary like a priest; he went regularly to mass and to all the offices; and where do you think he knelt?—(we noticed this afterward)—why not two steps from Madame de Merret's chapel. As he took his seat there ever since the first time he went into the church, no one imagined there could be anything in it; besides, the poor young man never raised his nose out of his book of prayers. Then, Monsieur, in the evening he used to walk on the hill in the ruins of the castle. It was his only amusement, poor man; it must have reminded him of his own country—Spain is nothing but mountains, so I've heard. From the first days of his detention he was always late at night. I was anxious, when I saw he didn't come in until just on the stroke of midnight; but we all got accustomed to his fancies. He took the key of the door, and we didn't sit up for him any longer. He lodged in the house we have in la rue des Casernes. Then one of our stable boys told us that one evening when he was going to wash the horses, he believed he had seen the Spanish grandee swimming like a fish some distance off in the river. When he came back I warned him to mind the weeds. He seemed annoyed at having been seen in the water. At last, Monsieur, one day, or rather one morning, we found he was not in his bedroom; he had not returned. After hunting about everywhere, I saw some writing in the drawer of his table, and with it fifty of the Spanish gold pieces they call portugals, equal to about fifty thou-

sand *francs;* and afterward in a little sealed box some diamonds, worth about ten thousand francs. Well, this writing said that in case he did not come back he left us the money and the diamonds, and charged us to have masses said to thank God for his escape and his safety. At that time I still had my husband with me, and he ran out to search for him. Now comes the oddest part of the story. He brought back the Spaniard's clothes, which he had found under a large stone in a sort of palisade on the bank of the river, on the *chateau* side, almost opposite La Grande Brétèche. My husband had got there so early that no one had seen them. When he had read the letter, he burned the clothes, and we gave out according to Count Feredia's desire that he had escaped. The sub-prefect set the whole *gendarmerie* at his heels; but, pooh! they never caught him. Lepas believed the Spaniard was drowned; but I don't, Monsieur. I believe he had something to do with that affair of Madame de Merret, seeing that Rosalie told me that the crucifix which her mistress was so fond of that she had it buried with her, was made of ebony and silver. Now during the first days of Monsieur Feredia's stay here he had a crucifix of ebony and silver, which I never saw among his things again. Now, Monsieur, you don't really think I need have any remorse about the fifty thousand *francs?* They really are mine?"

"Certainly. Then you've never tried to question Rosalie," I said.

"Haven't I though, Monsieur; but what am

I to do? That girl! she's—*a wall.* She knows something, but there's no getting anything out of her."

After talking to me for a few minutes more my hostess left me, tortured by vague and gloomy thoughts. I felt a romantic curiosity, and yet a sort of religious horror, like the profound sensation which takes hold of us when we go into a church at night. Under the lofty arches we perceive through the gloom a far-off flickering light, an uncertain form glides by us, we hear the rustle of a gown or a cassock—before we know it, we have shuddered. La Grande Brétèche, with its rank weeds, its worn-out casements, its rusted ironwork, its deserted chambers, its closed portals, rose up suddenly, fantastically before me. I would try to penetrate into this mysterious dwelling, by seeking for the knot of its solemn history, the drama that had slain three human beings. Rosalie was now the most interesting person to me in Vendôme. In spite of the glow of health which beamed from her chubby face, I discovered, after close scrutiny, the trace of hidden thoughts. She held within her the elements either of hope or remorse; her behavior suggested a secret, like those pious women who pray to excess, or a girl who has killed her child and is always hearing its last cry. Yet her attitudes were simple and awkward. There was nothing criminal in her broad, foolish smile, if only at the sight of her sturdy bust, covered with a red and blue check kerchief, and enclosed, impressed, and enlaced in a violet and white striped gown, you could

not have failed to think she was innocent. "No," thought I, "I shall not leave Vendôme until I know the whole history of La Grande Brétèche. I will become Rosalie's lover, if it is absolutely necessary, to gain my end." "Rosalie," said I one day. "Yes! if you please, Monsieur." "You are not married?" She gave a little start. "Oh, I shan't want for men, I can tell you, Monsieur, when the whim takes me to make a fool of myself," said she, laughing.

She quickly recovered from her inward emotion, for every woman, from a fine lady to a tavern drudge inclusively, has a *sang froid* especially her own.

"You are fresh and attractive enough not to lack lovers! But tell me, Rosalie, how was it you took a place at an inn after you had been with Madame de Merret? Didn't she leave you any pension?"

"Oh, yes, Monsieur; but my place is the best in all Vendôme."

This was one of those answers which judges and barristers call *dilatory*. It appeared to me, with regard to this romantic story, that Rosalie stood on the middle square of the chess board; she was at the very center of the interest and of the truth of it; she seemed to be bound up in the knot. It was no ordinary seduction I was attempting; this girl was like the last chapter of a romance. So from this moment Rosalie became the object of my predilections. By dint of studying her, I noticed in her—as one does in all the women whom we make our chief thought—a number of good qualities.

She was neat, diligent, pretty—of course that goes without saying; in fact, she was soon endowed with all the attractions which our desire attributes to women, in whatever situation they may be placed. A fortnight after the notary's visit, one evening—no, one morning; in fact, it was quite early—I said to Rosalie:

"Come, tell me all thou knowest about Madame de Merret!" "Oh, don't ask me that, Monsieur Horace," she answered with terror. Her pretty face grew dark, her bright vivid coloring faded, and her eyes lost all their soft and innocent luster. "Well," she said, "as you wish it, I *will* tell you; but whatever you do, keep the secret!" "Done! my dear child; I will keep all thy secrets with the integrity of a robber, which is the loyalest that exists." "If you don't mind," said she, "I had rather you kept them with your own." So she arranged her kerchief, and settled herself as one does to tell a tale, for certainly an attitude of confidence and security is a necessity in story-telling. The best stories are told at a not too early hour, and just as we are now, at table. No one ever told a story well standing or fasting. But if it were necessary to reproduce faithfully the diffuse eloquence of Rosalie, a whole volume would scarcely be enough. Now, since the event thus confusedly related to me bears exactly the same relation to the notary's and Madame Lepas's gossip, as the mean terms in arithmetical proportion bear to the extreme, I have nothing more to do than to tell it again in few words; so I abridge.

The bedroom which Madame de Merret occupied at la Brétèche was situated on the ground floor. In it, sunk in the wall, about four feet deep, was a small closet which she used for a wardrobe. Three months before the evening when the circumstances took place which I am about to relate to you, Madame de Merret was so seriously indisposed that her husband left her to sleep alone in her room, and went himself to sleep in a room on the first floor. On this evening, by one of those chances impossible to foresee, he came home from his club (where he went to read the papers and talk politics with the country gentlemen) two hours later than he was accustomed to. His wife thought that he had already come in and gone to bed and was asleep. But there had been a rather animated discussion on the subject of the invasion of France; the game of billiards too had proved an exciting one, and he had lost forty *francs*. This was an enormous sum at Vendôme, where every one hoards and morals are kept within bounds of most praiseworthy moderation; perhaps this is the source of that true contentment which Parisians do not appreciate. For some time Monsieur de Merret had contented himself with inquiring from Rosalie whether his wife had gone to bed, and on her always answering in the affirmative, he went straight to his own room with that simplicity which comes of habit and confidence. But that night, when he came in, the fancy took him to go and tell his ill luck to Madame de Merret, and also perhaps receive her sympathy. Now dur-

ing dinner he had observed that Madame de Merret was very becomingly dressed; and he remarked to himself as he came from his club that his wife's indisposition must have passed off, and that her convalescence had made her more beautiful than before. You see he noticed this, as husbands do everything, a little late in the day. At this moment Rosalie was in the kitchen, engaged in watching the cook and the coachman play out a difficult hand at *brisque;* so instead of calling her, Monsieur de Merret placed his lantern on the bottom step of the stairs, and by its light directed his steps toward his wife's bedroom. His footsteps were easy to recognize as they rang in the vaulted corridor. At the moment he turned the handle of his wife's door, he thought he heard the door of the closet I have mentioned shut; but when he came in Madame de Merret was alone, standing before the fireplace. Her husband in his simplicity thought to himself that it was Rosalie in the wardrobe, but yet a suspicion jangled like a chime in his ears and made him distrustful. He looked at his wife; he saw in her eyes a sort of troubled, fierce expression. "You are late to-night," said she. In her voice, before so pure and gracious, there seemed to him to have come a subtle change. He made no reply, for at that moment Rosalie came in. It was a thunderbolt to him.

He paced up and down the room, his arms folded, going from one window to the other with measured tread. "Have you had bad news, or are you in pain " she asked timidly, while Rosalie undressed her. He kept silence.

"You can go," said Madame de Merret to her lady's maid; "I will put in my curl-papers myself." She divined some evil from the very look on her husband's face, and wished to be alone with him. When Rosalie was gone—or ostensibly gone, for she waited for some minutes in the corridor—Monsieur de Merret came and sat down before his wife, and said coldly, "Madame, there is some one in your wardrobe." She looked calmly at her husband, and said simply, "No, Monsieur." This "No" wounded Monsieur de Merret to the quick; he did not believe it, and yet his wife had never seemed to him purer or holier than she looked at that moment.

He rose and went to open the closet. Madame de Merret took his hand and stopped him, looked at him with a melancholy air, and said in a voice of extreme emotion, "Remember, if you do not find any one there, all will be over between us!" The incredible dignity stamped upon the figure of his wife restored him to a profound sense of esteem for her, and inspired him with one of those resolves which only need a vaster stage to become immortal. "No, Josephine," said he, "I will not go. In either case we should be parted for ever. Listen! I know all the purity of thy soul; I know that thou leadest a holy life, that thou wouldst not commit a mortal sin to save thyself death." At these words Madame de Merret looked at her husband with a wild light in her eyes. "Stop, here is thy crucifix," added the man. "Swear to me before God that there is no one there. I will trust you—I will

never open that door, "I swear." "Louder," said her husband; "and repeat, 'I swear before God there is no one in that wardrobe.'" She repeated the phrase unmoved. "It is well," said Monsieur de Merret coldly.

After a moment's silence: "That's a very fine thing you have, I have not noticed it before," said he, examining the crucifix, which was of ebony and silver, and very finely carved. "I picked it up at Duvivier's; he bought it of a Spanish *religieux* last summer, when that troop of Spanish prisoners passed through Vendôme."

"Oh!" said Monsieur de Merret, and hung up the crucifix upon the nail again; then he rang the bell. Rosalie did not keep him waiting. Monsieur de Merret went quickly to meet her, drew her into the embrasure of the window which looked out on the garden, and said, in a low voice: "I know that Gorenflot wants to marry you, that it's only your poverty which prevents your setting up house, and that you have refused to marry him if he can't manage to make himself a master mason—very well! go and fetch him; tell him to come here with his trowel and his other tools. Manage so as to wake no one in his house except him, and you'll make a much finer fortune than you ever even coveted. Above all, go out of this house without chattering; if you do not ——" and he frowned. Rosalie went; he called her back. "Stop, take my latch-key," said he.

"Jean!" thundered Monsieur de Merret in the corridor.

Jean, who served both as coachman and con-

fidential servant, left his game of *brisque*, and came.

"Go, all of you, to bed," said his master, making him a sign to come up close to him; then he added, in a low voice, "When they are all asleep—*asleep*, mind—come down and tell me."

Monsieur de Merret, who had not lost sight of his wife all the time he was giving his orders, came back quietly to her before the fire, and proceeded to relate the events of his billiard match and their discussions at the club. When Rosalie came back, she found Monsieur and Madame de Merret talking amicably together.

The Count had recently had ceilings made to all the rooms on the ground floor, which he used for receptions. It was this circumstance that had suggested to him the plan he proceeded to carry into execution. "Monsieur, Gorenflot is here," said Rosalie in a low voice. "Let him come in," said the Picard aloud.

Madame de Merret grew a little pale when she saw the mason. "Gorenflot," said her husband, "go and get some bricks from under the coach-house, and bring enough to wall up the door of that closet; you can use some of the plaster I have by me, for plastering the the wall." Then he drew Rosalie and the workman aside, and said to them, in a low voice: "Listen, Gorenflot, you will sleep here to-night, but to-morrow morning you shall have a passport to go abroad to a town which I will name. I shall send you six thousand *francs* for the journey. You will remain for ten years in this town; if the place does not please you,

you can settle in another, provided only that it is in the same country. You will pass through Paris, wait for me there; there I will settle on you, by deed, six thousand *francs* more, which shall be paid you on your return, if you have fulfilled the conditions of our bargain. For this sum you must keep the most absolute silence about what you are going to do to-night. As to you, Rosalie, I will give you ten thousand *francs*, not to be paid over to you until the day of your marriage, and then only on condition that you marry Gorenflot; but to marry, you must be silent; if not, you get no dowry."

"Rosalie," said Madame de Merret, "come and do my hair."

Her husband paced quietly from one end of the room to the other, watching the door, the mason, and his wife, but without displaying any offensive distrust. Gorenflot could not help making some noise. While the workman was unloading his bricks, and her husband was at the end of the room, Madame de Merret seized the opportunity of saying to Rosalie: "A thousand *francs* a year for thee, my dear child, if thou canst tell Gorenflot to leave a chink near the bottom." Then she said aloud, and with perfect composure, "Go and help him."

Monsieur and Madame de Merret remained silent during the whole time Gorenflot took to wall up the door. With the husband, this silence arose from calculation; he did not wish to give his wife a chance of saying anything which might have a double meaning. With Madame de Merret, it was prudence or pride.

When the wall had reached half the necessary height, the cunning mason seized an opportunity when Monsieur de Merret's back was turned, and gave one of the two panes of glass in the door a blow with his pick. This made Madame de Merret understand that Rosalie had spoken to Gorenflot. Then they all three saw the sad, dark face of a man, with black hair and gleaming eyes. Before her husband had turned round, the poor woman had time to make a sign with her head to the stranger. By this sign she would have said to him, "Hope!"

At four o'clock, just before daylight, the wall was finished. The mason remained in the house, guarded by Jean, and Monsieur de Merret went to bed in his wife's room. The next morning, while he was getting up, he said carelessly: "The deuce! I must go to the mayor and get that passport." He put his hat on his head, took three steps to the door, then turned round and took the crucifix. His wife trembled with delight. "He is going to Duvivier's," she thought. As soon as he had gone out, Madame de Merret rang for Rosalie. "The pick, the pick!" she cried in a voice of terror; "to work! I saw how Gorenflot began yesterday; we shall have time to make a hole and stop it up again." In the twinkling of an eye Rosalie had brought her mistress a sort of marline, and she began to set to work to pull down the wall with an energy of which no words could give the least idea. She had already dislodged some of the bricks; she was gathering up her strength for a still more vigorous blow, when she saw Monsieur de Merret standing behind her. She

fell on the floor in a swoon. "Lay Madame on the bed," said the Picard coldly. Foreseeing what would happen during his absence, he had laid a trap for his wife. He had really written to the mayor and sent for Duvivier. In fact the jeweller arrived just after the disorder in which the room lay had been cleared away.

"Duvivier," he asked, "did you not buy some crucifixes from those Spaniards when they passed through the town?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Thank you, I am much obliged." He darted the look of a tiger at his wife, and she returned it. "Jean," he added, "have my meals served in Madame de Merret's room, as she is very ill. I shall not leave her until she has fully recovered her health.

The cruel Picard remained for twenty days close to his wife. During the first part of the time, if any sound came from the walled-up wardrobe, and Josephine began to implore him to have mercy on the dying stranger, he prevented her from saving a single word by answering: "*You swore upon the crucifix that there was no one there.*"

. . . . . .

After this narrative all the ladies rose from the table, and the charm under which Bianchon had held them was dispelled. Nevertheless some of them had felt a sort of chill when they heard the last sentence.

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442 Oscar Wilde in Outline. Finger.
305 Machiavelli. Lord Macaulay
358 Virginibus Puerisque. Stevenson.
431 Literary Stars on Scandinavian Firmament. Moritzen.
435 Hundred Best Books. Powys.
109 Dante and Other Waning Classics. Vol. 1. Mordell.
110 Dante and Other Waning Classics. Vol. 2. Mordell.
349 An Apology for Idlers. Stevenson.
355 Aucassin and Nicolete. Lang
278 Friendship and Other Essays. Thoreau.
195 Thoughts on Nature. Thoreau.
220 England in Shakespeare's Time. Finger.
194 Lord Chesterfield's Letters.
63 A Defense of Poetry. Shelley
97 Love Letters of King Henry VIII.
3 Eighteen Essays. Voltaire.
28 Toleration. Voltaire.
89 Love Letters of Men and Women of Genius.
186 How I Wrote "The Raven." Poe.
87 Love, an Essay. Montaigne.
48 Bacon's Essays.
60 Emerson's Essays.
84 Love Letters of a Portuguese Nun.
26 On Going to Church. G. B. Shaw.

G. B. Shaw.
135 Socialism for Millionaires.
61 Tolstoi's Essays.
176 Four Essays. Havelock Ellis.
75 Choice of Books. Carlyle.
288 Essays on Chesterfield and Rabelais. Sainte-Beuve.
76 The Prince of Peace. W. J. Bryan.
86 On Reading. Brandes.
95 Confessions of An Opium Eater. De Quincy.
177 Subjection of Women J. S. Mill.
17 On Walking. Thoreau.
70 Charles Lamb's Essays.
235 Essays. Gilbert K. Chesterton
7 A Liberal Education. Thos. Huxley.
233 Thoughts on Literature and Art. Goethe.
225 Condescension in Foreigners. Lowell.
221 Women, and Other Essays. Maeterlinck.
10 Shelley. Francis Thompson.
289 Pepys' Diary.
299 Prose Nature Notes. Whitman.
315 Pen, Pencil and Poison. Wilde.
313 The Decay of Lying. Oscar Wilde.
36 Soul of Man Under Socialism. Wilde.
293 Francois Villon: Student, Poet and Housebreaker. Stevenson.
213 Lecture on Lincoln. Ingersoll.

Maxims & Epigrams

444 Epigrams of Remy De Gourmont.
402 Epigrams of George Moore.
77 What Great Men Have Said About Women.
304 What Great Women Have Said About Men.
179 Gems From Emerson.
310 The Wisdom of Thackeray.
193 Wit and Wisdom of Charles Lamb.
197 Witticisms and Reflections. De Sevigne.
180 Epigrams of Geo. Bernard Shaw.
155 Maxims. Napoleon.
181 Epigrams. Thoreau.
228 Aphorisms. Huxley.
168 Epigrams. Oscar Wilde.
59 Epigrams of Wit and Wisdom.
35 Maxims. Rochefoucauld.
154 Epigrams of Ibsen.
56 Wisdom of Ingersoll.
106 Aphorisms. George Sand.
478 Sanskrit Proverbs.
479 Proverbs of Germany.
388 Proverbs of Hindustan.
401 Proverbs of India.
113 Proverbs of England.
114 Proverbs of France.
115 Proverbs of Japan.
116 Proverbs of China.
117 Proverbs of Italy.
118 Proverbs of Russia.
119 Proverbs of Ireland.
120 Proverbs of Spain.
121 Proverbs of Arabia.
348 Proverbs of Scotland.
380 Proverbs of Yugoslavia.

Music

(Note: In the operatic titles listed below, Mr. von Keler gives short biographical sketches, the story of the opera and helpful criticism of the music, illustrated by excerpts from the score.)

440 Cavalleria Rusticana. Von Keler.
441 I Pagliacci. Von Keler.
456 Carmen. Von Keler.
457 Lohengrin. Von Keler.
458 Tannhauser. Von Keler.
459 Das Rheingold. Von Keler.

Philosophy and Religion

470 Guide to Kant. Thomas.
421 Yoga Philosophy. Carrington.
443 Guide to Francis Bacon. Durant.
477 Theosophy in Outline. Willis

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